FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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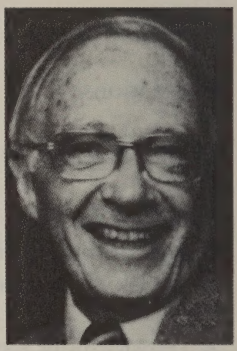
Cover photograph by Janet Kerr: The photographer's home in the South of France.



In this period of rapid, often confusing and frightening change, it's life and soul-saving to remember Teilhard de Chardin's observation: We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

That experience is often joyful, often sad, often tragic and murderous.

Yet there is clear and growing evidence that deep within, each of us possesses extraordinary capacities of love, compassion, and wisdom that are as yet untapped.

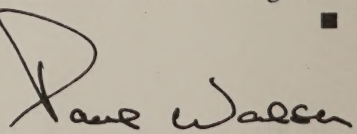
The saints, mystics and God-drenched souls of all religions, down through the ages, have revealed to us what it is in us to become. Each of them has realized and acted on the heart's truth that we all are God's children, all inextricably interconnected and interrelated, all brothers and sisters.

All of us want the same things: peace, happiness, freedom from suffering. The spiritual path that leads to those blessings is an evolutionary journey toward the ultimate truth that God is unconditional love and that there is that of God in each of us. We need only to open our hearts and minds to that truth and to act on it in every encounter of our daily lives.

As Fellowship in Prayer approaches the millennium (and it's 50th anniversary) we take very seriously the challenge and the opportunity to bring that truth out to growing numbers of people who share an active concern with the spiritual values of loving kindness and compassion, and a belief in the innate worth, dignity, and divinity of every person.

We have a great new editor, Rebecca Laird, who you will meet in the pages of the next issue. She is committed to using these pages to present writers who can help us all find meaning in life; faith, hope, and courage in the face of despair; and joy and gratitude for the gifts and blessings each day brings.

Also, by the time you read these words, we will have a presence—a Home Page and Web Site—on the World Wide Web. This will enable us to extend our mission to countless people all over the globe as we invite them to discover and participate in the world of prayer and meditation and the realization that their true nature is joyful, peaceful, loving and kind. We'll let you know our "address" on the web as soon as we go on-line! ■



Paul Walsh

This is what you should do, love the Earth and the Sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or any number of men, reexamine what you've been told at school or in church or in any book, dismiss what insults your soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.

(from the preface to Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass, 1855*)*

Is morality possible without God? I answer with a question: is Divinity possible without relation to a human Other?... As Jews, we are always a threesome: I and you and the Third who is in our midst. And only as a Third does God reveal Himself.

Emmanuel Levinas

If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels, but have not love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but am without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not insist on it's own way. Love takes no pleasure in other people's wrongs but delights in the good; it forgives all things, trusts all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love does not come to an end. But if there are gifts of prophecy, the time will come when they must fail; or the gift of languages, it will not continue for ever; and knowledge—for this, too, the time will come when it must fail. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will disappear. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, and thought like a child, and reasoned like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. For now we see in a glass darkly; but then we shall see face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love. ■

1 Corinthians 3.13

The Practice of Tonglen

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

As a fully ordained Buddhist nun, Pema Chödrön is one of a very small number of Western women involved in the Tibetan tradition and one of the first American practitioners of the vajrayana *tradition to undergo the preparation and ceremony of full ordination.*

Born in 1936 in New York, Pema is a mother of two and recently became a grandmother. She attended Miss Porter's School in Connecticut and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. She was an elementary school teacher for many years in both New Mexico and California. Pema was in her mid-thirties when she first connected with the Buddhist teachings. In 1971 she traveled to the French Alps and encountered Lama Chime, Rinpoche, with whom she studied for several years. She became a nun in 1974 while studying with Lama Chime in London. His Holiness the Seventh Gyalwa Karmapa came to England at that time, and Pema received her novice ordination from him then.

Pema first met Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, in February 1972. Lama Chime encouraged her to work with Trungpa Rinpoche, and it was with him that she ultimately made her most profound connection, studying with him from 1973 until his death in 1987.

At the request of His Holiness Karmapa, she received the full Bhiksuni ordination in the Chinese lineage of Buddhism in 1981 in Hong Kong.

For the past six years Pema has lived at Gampo Abbey, a monastic center situated on two hundred acres of ocean front land in the Cape Breton Highlands of Nova Scotia. Founded in 1984, Gampo Abbey is part of the Vajradhatu Association of Buddhist Churches. Pema is currently the director of Gampo Abbey. When she is not in strict retreat and can take time off from her Abbey duties, she travels extensively, teaching at contemplative centers throughout Europe and North America.

Pema is very interested in aiding the development of the Buddhist monastic tradition in the West, and is drawn in particular to the extraordinary richness and wisdom found in the Tibetan monastic tradition. She is the author of Wisdom of No Escape, *and the forthcoming book,* Be Grateful to Everyone.

In the following article, she describes one of Buddhism's most challenging practices, tonglen.

The ground of the tonglen practice is to develop your heart; the practice begins with your aspiration to help others, and the way to help others is to develop sympathy and friendship for yourself, and then to extend that out. If you have sympathy for your own confusion, and the bravery and willingness to relate with your

own confusion directly, then you can extend that out to relate directly and gently with the confusion of other people.

There is one aspect of tonglen that you might find particularly penetrating and useful in your practice and development: those things that you consider to be your greatest obstacles—your rage, for instance, or your neediness or your jealousy, which eat you up. These are actually your link with understanding the confusion of other people. The more honest you can be about seeing these things in yourself, the more you will be able to open your heart when other people are feeling torn apart by those same kinds of feelings.

Stage One: Openness

Tonglen practice has three stages. The first stage is traditionally referred to as "flashing openness." This flash of openness is done very quickly. For example, when you are practicing meditation in a shrine room with the fan going, and suddenly someone turns the fan off, there is some sort of natural flash of silence and space. It is a very simple thing: a feeling of openness occurs, as when we stand on the beach and look out to sea.

Stage Two: Breathing in Dark, Breathing out Light

The next stage is working with texture: breathing in dark, heavy, and hot; breathing out light and cool. The idea is that you are always breathing in the same thing: you are essentially breathing in the cause of suffering, the origin of suffering, which is fixation. Fixation is the tendency to hold on with a vengeance to yourself, to "ME," capital M, capital E.

> The way to help others is to develop sympathy and friendship for yourself, and then to extend that out.

You may have noticed that when you get very angry, or very needy, or very jealous, you experience that fixation as dark, hot, solid, and heavy. That is actually the texture of neurosis, the texture of fixation. You may have also noticed times when you are all caught up in yourself, and then some sort of contrast or gap occurs. It's very spacious. It's the experience of mind that is not fixated on phenomena. It's the experience of openness. The quality, or texture, of that openness is generally experienced as very light, fresh, clear, and cool. Those are the qualities of openness.

Brooks Walsh

So the second stage is simply working with those textures. You breathe in dark, heavy, and hot through all the pores of your body, and you radiate out light and cool. There is a sense of hot and heavy coming in through all the pores of your body, and light and cool radiating out in three hundred and sixty degrees. So you work with the texture until you feel that it is synchronized, until it is clear that dark is coming in and light is going out on the medium of the breath: in and out; in and out.

Stage Three: Working with Suffering

In the third stage you work with suffering. This part of the practice should be very, very real. It should be totally untheoretical. It should be heartfelt; it should be tangible and honest and true to you and vivid.

The third stage has two parts: you might want to think of these as 3(a) and 3(b). In 3(a), you are working with specific suffering, specific pain, specific emotions, a very experiential sense of pain or suffering, yours or someone else's. In 3(b), you are extending that sense of suffering out to include everyone everywhere who is feeling the same thing. So you need to work with both of those situations. If you just

had the idea of helping all sentient beings, the practice would be very theoretical and distant. It would never sincerely touch your heart. On the other hand, if you just work with your own suffering or the suffering of those close to you, it lacks vision. It would be too narrow. Working with both of those situations together makes the practice real and heartfelt; at the same time, it provides vision and a way for you to work with everyone in the world as well. I will describe how that works.

You should start 3(a) with something very close to home. It could be your own anger, for example, which you might be feeling at that moment; or it could be the pain of someone else whom you love very much, someone with whom you can connect very easily without any complications.

Either sitting in a quiet place doing tonglen or in postmeditation, you bring all of your unfinished karmic business right into the practice. You invite it right in. Suppose that you are involved in a horrific relationship: every time you think of a particular person you get furious. That is *very useful* for tonglen! Or perhaps you feel completely left out. Life is making you feel more wretched every day, completely poverty stricken. It was all you could do to get out of bed this morning. You're so depressed that you want to stay in bed for the rest of your life; you have actually considered hiding under your bed. That is very useful for tonglen practice. It should be *real*, just like that.

Let's use another example. You may be formally doing tonglen or just sitting in a cafe having your coffee. And ... "Here he comes!" ... "Here he comes!" As soon as you see him or even think of him, you feel one of three poisons: either passion or aggression or ignorance. You want to hit him, grasp him, or not pay any attention to him at all.

> Without any pretending, you can actually *know* that about 2 billion other sentient beings are feeling that exact same rage in that second of time.

Let's say that what you feel is fury. You breathe that in. The idea is to first develop sympathy for your own confusion. And the technique is that you do not blame him; you also do not blame yourself. Instead, there is just liberated fury. It is hot, dark, and heavy. And you experience it as fully as you can.

You breathe the anger in; and you stop talking to yourself about him; you stop thinking about him. In fact, he is just a useful catalyst. You can be grateful to him for helping you to see how captured you are by your emotions. You can drive all blame into yourself, breathing it in. This doesn't mean to say that you blame yourself, but you own your rage completely. It takes a lot of bravery, and it's extremely insulting to ego. In fact, it completely destroys the whole mechanism of ego, of how we always want things on our own terms. So you breathe in.

Then, you breathe out sympathy, relaxation, and spaciousness. Instead of just a small, dark situation, you allow a lot of space for that feeling to exist. Don't slow down the process by trying to think what the proper antidote would be. Just allow space. When you breathe out, it is like ventilating the whole thing, airing it out. Breathing out is like opening up your arms and just letting go altogether. Fresh air. Then you breathe the rage in again: rage ... the dark, heavy hotness to it. And then you breathe out, ventilating the whole thing, allowing a lot of space.

What you are actually doing is cultivating kindness towards yourself. It is very simple in that way. You don't think about it; you don't philosophize; you simply breathe in very real emotions and feelings. You own them completely and then ventilate them, allowing a lot of space when you breathe out. This, in itself, is an amazing practice, even if it didn't go any further—because at this level, you are still working on yourself. But the real beauty of the practice is that you then extend that out, which is the next stage, stage 3(b).

Working with Others.

Without any pretending, you can acknowledge, you can actually ***know***, that about two billion other sentient beings are feeling that exact same rage in that second of time. They are experiencing it exactly the way you are experiencing it. They may have a different storyline, but the story isn't the point. The point is the rage itself. So you breathe it in from all of them, so they no longer have to have it. It doesn't actually make your rage any greater; instead, it opens your heart and softens you. So—you breathe in with the wish that all of us could be free of this kind of pain.

Sometimes, at that moment, you get a glimpse of why there is murder and rape, why there is war, why people burn down buildings, why there is so much misery in the world. It all comes from feeling that rage and trying to escape it by blaming it on others or feeling ashamed. Instead we could breathe it in, know it completely, and air it.

At that point, it is no longer *your* own particular burden; it is just the rage of sentient beings, which includes you. You breathe that in, and you breathe out a sense of ventilation, so that all sentient beings could experience that. This goes for *anything* that bothers you. The more it bothers you, the more awake you're going to be when you do tonglen.

These things that really haunt us and drive us crazy actually have enormous energy in them. That is why we fear them. It could even be your timidity. Say you are very, very timid and afraid to speak, afraid to walk up and say "hello" to someone, afraid to look someone in the eye. There is enormous maintenance and energy in that. It is the way you keep yourself together. So you have the chance to own that completely, not blaming anybody, and to ventilate it with the outbreath. Then you might better understand why some other person over there looks so grim: it isn't because they hate you; they also feel the same kind of timidity and don't want to look anyone in the face.

So your own pain is like kindling, or a stepping stone for understanding the pain of others.

By practicing meditation in this way, you definitely develop your sympathy for other people, and you begin to understand them a lot better. As you do this practice and your heart develops more and more, even if someone comes up and insults you, you might genuinely and without a second thought understand the whole situation. You might feel that sort of pain—like the hair on the eyeball, instead of the hair on the hand—because you understand so well where everybody's coming from. You also realize that you can help others by simply breathing *in* their pain and sending them that ventilation. So the second way of doing tonglen is to work with other people. That is actually the point of the practice: working with others and developing your sense of caring for them.

Last year, a friend told me that he always begins his tonglen in the same way. He thinks about a puppy he saw when he was eight years old. This puppy was being stoned to death by people who were laughing and jeering as they killed it: it was whimpering and dying. When he does his practice it is so straightforward: all he has to do is think of that dog, and his heart is activated instantly. There is nothing complicated about it. He would have done anything to breathe in the suffering of that animal and to breathe out relief. So the idea is to start with something like that, something that activates your heart.

Gradually, you can extend your practice out to people who are somewhat "neutral," those you pass by on the street or the neighbors or co-workers you hardly know. Eventually the practice of tonglen moves out until you can include even the people you consider to be your enemies. You think, for instance, of a puppy being stoned and dying in pain, and you breathe that in. Then it is no longer just a puppy. It is your connection with the realization that there are puppies and people suffering unjustly like that all over the world.

So you start close to home and then immediately extend the practice out and breathe in the suffering of all the people who are suffering like that animal. In this way you can let your own experience be a stepping stone for working in the whole world. ■

Largo of the Holešovice Quarter

MILA TOMÁŠ

Prior to 1989, when the Communist suppression of religion in Czechoslovakia came to an end, Mila Tomáš and her husband Edward could only circulate their books in illegal typewritten copies. Today, at last, they are free to publish their deeply beautiful and lyrical reflections on the mystical journey to and in God.

Soon after the second world war I moved to Prague, to the quarter of Holešovice. At that time I was very busy with my work and study, putting in many hours per day, but I did all this work for God with the constant thought of Him. In the permanent awareness of Him I was surrounded by His holy presence and Grace.

Nonetheless, I used each and every moment of relaxation for even deeper concentration and contemplation, with mind pointed to Him, for unification with Him. When I was completely relaxed and turned within, my little self started to dissolve and with full and clear awareness I became one with the all-encompassing and all-pervading divine Self, creating and filling the whole universe.

What remained of my human self was only a tiny spark, the last tiny bubble on the infinite ocean of the great Self, which was on the verge of dissolving in quiet surrender into the monolithic water of the divine consciousness. Then this dying-out spark, this dissolving bubble, heard a hushed marvelous tune of Dvórak's "Largo" from his *New World Symphony,* which I loved so much. To its first notes I used to add the words of my declaration of love to God, invoking His holy presence: "Great God, God boundless."

This innermost prayer expressing the elevation of a soul longing for God, this holiest Mantra, with which I used to joyfully call God so often and with which I would get even closer to Him, came to me in the most intimate moment when my soul was becoming one with God. This prayer started to infiltrate the awareness of the dying-out spark of my human self and this dying-out and surrendering self was immediately brought to life by listening to it.

The tiny spark of my human self started to praise God with this holiest mantra as it had done numerous times before. The sound intensified in volume, till it became tremendous, ravishing. It filled

This article was taken with permission from Beyond Time and Space, *a book by the Czechoslvakian writer, Mila Tomáš , translated into English by Blanka Novotna and edited by Joann Wojtyto and Terrie Jameson. It has not yet been published.*

Kay Danielson

the universe and engulfed the subtlety and stillness of the rebirthing of the human self into the divine Self, *becoming* one with it.

So my human self prevailed again in this game of duality. At least it became a worshipper of the great Self; if only it could spare itself like this.

The noble "Largo," so elevating and ennobling before, the holiest mantra of mine inserted into its tune, so exalted and effective—exactly this pulled me out from the peak moment of the highest sacrifice. It happened at the last step of surrendering myself to God. Yet this connection of soul and God, this rebirth, cannot take place in any other way than in the deepest silence, in the greatest silence of mind, without its minutest movement or quiver, in an absolute surrender of the ego in mystical death.

Since the ego does not want to surrender for a long time, it uses each opportunity, even the holiest one, to avoid its own death. At the peak moment, even the holiest mantra is an obstacle.

Universal, Formless Being,
Nameless, Oh Being!

Without attributes.

How distant I am from You
When I invoke Your Grace
And receive it fully.

How distant I am from You
When I praise Your grace
Which is filling me.

Oh my love, burn yourself,
Oh longing, drown in the last wave.

Abysmal Depth
Engulf that
Which still wants to be
At least a worshipper.

When my human self fully came to itself, I cried from regret and asked the Lord to help me overcome this intricate verge of mystical death, from which many turn back. It is the fear of death that returned me to the sphere of "unlimited awareness," which is not the ultimate one. So I asked God to help me die for him, assuring him that I did not want anything else.

Several days later during contemplation I again reached a deep internal state. I was submerging more and more into God's presence.

Janet Kerr

Initially I could hear beautiful music similar to the famous tune from Smetana's opera, *Bartered Bride*, with the lyrics "Come then let us all be merry since God grants us health today." I had heard it before quite often. Although the tune reminded me of those heard in the world, the sound was perfect. Later I heard the same ideas from an acquaintance of ours, an organist and composer: Inner music is perfect, while outer instruments, even the best, are not that flawless.

To the music, "Come then let us be merry," which supposedly expressed worldly joys, I gave a clear answer within: "I do not want this," and submerged deeper. The cheerful, merry tones changed immediately into a marvelous hymn, which always before used to elevate my mind and my feelings to God.

Since the ego does not want to surrender for a long time, it uses each opportunity, even the holiest one, to avoid its own death.

But my more deep-seated self said again: "I do not want this either," And the deepest, divine Self said with a mute voice, still present in my consciousness:

"What do you want then?"

With all my heart, all my being, I answered:

"To die for God."

At that instant the universe swayed, dissolved, and turned into an infinite Void. Initially, while I still perceived, it seemed to me as if I held an infinite shawl knit from endless single loops and had pulled the proper string. In an instant the whole shawl lessened into a single thread and even that dissolved. In the same way the universe dissolved into its primal matter — divine Being, in which my human consciousness completely disappeared.

Even this experience that lasted several days did not remain permanent, although it clearly stayed in the depth of my consciousness. Only several years later and after several submersions (samadhi), the trace of duality dissolved and never reappeared again.

From this experience that happened in the early morning at summer equinox many years ago, nothing was ever lost nor was added; only some dependencies were gradually dissolved. This experience of Unity is alluded to in my poem, "Awakening," and several other poems. ➢

Awakening

Awakening in the morning
To greet You
As before,
But although You are everywhere
Nowhere can You be found.

Your altar grew empty,
The rose fragrance is gone,
Everything else is empty.
And still You grow through all like a Bodhi tree.

You are not here as before, in my Heart -
Since lo! There's no heart any more
Neither am I as before.
Then I wished to die in Your embrace.

There is no You and there is no me,
And yet I have so much of You,
That my last wish to feel Your embrace,
Has withered away,

In absolute certainty,
That it's always been this way,
In the Beginning and for ever and ever.

June 21, 1958

How Noble the Lord's Prayer is

MILA TOMÁŠ

Our Father, I am calling you with all my heart, with all my being, in the deepest meekness, in the deepest silence of my heart, in the deepest stillness of my mind's reflections and images.

You, who are in heaven, where no human reflection and agitation exists, I am calling you to hallow your name in our consciousness.

You, who are nameless, all names are yours, since all is created only by You, and so every name and every form is Yours, being nothing but Your name.

Only in our consciousness, seemingly separated and so darkened by our ignorance, we learned to discern Your creation as something separate from you and to consider Your eternal calm to be Your heaven, where we placed you in our imagination.

Since we ourselves, by our own will, have seemingly separated from You and also from Your creation, to which we belong, we have distanced ourselves from You.

And now I am calling You, our Father - not mine, but ours - the Essence and Primal Cause of everything, let me - and us - realize that we are one with You.

Hallowed be Your name, so that we recognize that it is You.

Your kingdom come, so that the Divine consciousness dissolves the delusion of separation of our individual consciousness from You. In full surrender of myself, in deepest meekness, with all my being, I yield to Your holy will, so that the Consciousness, which is not separate from You and Your creation, is as in heaven, so on Earth.

Nurture our entire life with Your revealed holy presence as with your bread, and forgive us our trespasses of ignorance, since we too forgive our neighbors both their ignorance and our ignorance in them. And do not lead us into the temptation of a new separation from you, but deliver us from the evil of oblivion.

Amen. ■

Coming 'Home' on the Way to Work: A Lesson in Prayer

MARY E. DELISIO

Caught in traffic moving at a snail's pace, a commuter who wasn't looking for anything found God.

We invite you to send the story of your own transforming experience to The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ, 08542. You do not need to be a professional writer.

On the morning of Tuesday, July 3, 1993, I came to know in a stunningly graphic way one specific definition of prayer. A definition not yet ascribed to any dictionary.

Just prior to this extraordinary moment, I was enduring my usual drive to work, which commenced at a snail's pace, and continued in a manner destined to blend it into the dismal blur of all previous morning commutes. With one small exception: the glorious day itself. A day blessed with gentle breezes, a mild temperature (for July!) and very low humidity. Gradually, I became less aware of the glacial crawl of the asphalt beneath me, and more aware of the glittering sunlight as it swept through the trees and lush vegetation lining the highway, collecting it all in a golden embrace, from deep within a cloudless sky of such an intense blue I suddenly felt I could simply disappear into it. And from this feeling, this intoxicating awareness of the wealth of beauty surrounding me, I found myself actually enjoying the ride. I felt strangely light. Not dizzy or "spacey." Just light. And free. And joyful. Absolutely delighted to be alive on such a magnificent day. Then, unexpectedly, the remake of the old Van Morrison song "Have I Told You Lately..." by Rod Stewart began playing on the radio, a song I normally would have changed stations just to avoid. But on that day, for some reason, I became oddly transfixed by the lyrics, listening intently.

At that exact moment the phrase, "there's no one else above you," registered in my mind, my heart simply opened of its own accord without any effort on my part, and I simultaneously "felt" and "saw" a kind of soft light pour down through my body, eventually expanding to where it seemed to envelop me completely. I continued to focus on the words of the song, and as each verse was repeated, I felt my heart

Mary Delisio is a freelance writer in Farmingdale, New York.

open wider, and a powerful sensation of love gust, like the gentlest fountain of light, from my heart back up through my body into what felt like infinity itself. A feeling of a love at once so fragile and glorious, I wanted to plunge upward with my whole spirit, my whole "self," and for the briefest, almost imperceptible instant, I wanted to BE the love that was pouring toward the cosmos from the essence of my being. I wanted to be indistinguishable from the exquisite feeling it summoned me.

But the most astonishing aspect of this entire episode is that I immediately recognized this extraordinary feeling of love as MY LOVE FOR GOD: A concept at which my erstwhile agnostic sympathies would have once caused me to cringe. As it was, I felt a bit confused, because I had no idea where this impulse to "love God" came from. It just came to me. Out of nowhere. I know now it was Divine Guidance, for which I am inexpressibly grateful, because I'd never experienced such a beautiful, delicate, tender, yet overwhelmingly powerful emotion for anyone else, for any other living creature, in my entire life. That breathless feeling of Love I experienced on that otherwise uneventful morning was at once so utterly complete, so fulfilling, and yet so stabilizing, I can't put it adequately into words, except that all other loves seem as dim and rough as stones by comparison.

But then, even with all that this exceptional Love had already gifted me, impossibly, I was given something more: All at once, it occurred to me that what had just happened was the truest, purest form of PRAYER, and that I should always pray in this fashion, giving the whole of my Love with my prayers, and send them from my heart to the farthest reaches of Creation. The whole of my Love. My being. My spirit. Just give it UP. All of it. Without hesitation. Again and again and again. Because this is the only true kind of offering one can make.

On that July morning, I received a breathtaking lesson in prayer, one initiated without years in cloistered study of sacred texts, without the shelter of houses of worship, and without careful adherence to specific holy days. I learned about prayer by being open to the devastating beauty of nature, and to the Divine Truth hidden in the words of an ordinary top-40 hit, all while sitting in everyday traffic.

And I learned about prayer at precisely the moment I most needed to. Exactly four days later, my husband received warning from his employer, a major defense contractor, that he was on the next layoff list. My husband's actual termination came to pass on November 11, and he would not see gainful reemployment for nearly two years. It is this profound feeling of Love and lesson in how to return it, contained in the deepest, wordless, most heartfelt impulse, that has sustained me, buoyed me, and spirited me through these recent years of oppressive struggle. ■

Love and Work

MICHAEL ROBERTSON

A teacher learns at the death of his father that love belongs in the workplace as much so at home.

"Love and work," Freud responded when asked what was necessary for a fulfilling life. Throughout my adult years, I took his words as a guide. They seemed simple, elegant, incontestable. What matters, ultimately, is the work I do and my relationships with others. The challenge of life is to find the balance between work and love.

Not that finding the balance is easy. As an ambitious professional in a demanding job—mine happens to be college teaching—I see the balance constantly tipping in my job's favor. The dilemma is familiar to millions of people. In a two-career marriage with both partners in highly demanding jobs, there's never enough time to spend with family, to get together with friends. The balance between love and work seems permanently askew. But I never doubted that what mattered most in life was to find an equilibrium between the two.

Until recently. My father died last fall, and at his memorial service I had a revelation that caused me to doubt the dichotomy between love and work.

My father had spent thirty years in the city where he died, and at his memorial service the church was packed with family, friends and, most of all, with hundreds of people he had known through his work. Representatives from the family and from among his friends and co-workers spoke at the service, and afterwards everyone filed through a line to shake hands with my mother, my brothers, and me and to say a few words to us about my father. As I listened to their words at the service and afterwards, the revelation hit me: not one person said a thing about my father's work.

My father's job was an important one in the community, and he was very good at what he did. As vice-president of a business, he had many responsibilities, worked long hours, and contributed much to his business and, indirectly, to the city where he lived. Yet no one said anything about my father's professional accomplishments.

I understood why. To mention my father's job at such a time would have trivialized the occasion. Confronted with death, with the need

Michael Robertson is a member of Princeton (New Jersey) Friends Meeting. He teaches English at Trenton State College.

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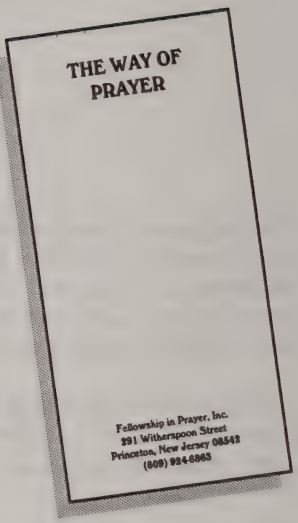

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What would you like to tell us about your spiritual needs, desires, experiences? About *Fellowship in Prayer*? Use the space below!

to articulate what was important and lasting about my father, no one wanted to talk about his work. Instead, they wanted to talk about their relationships with him.

What matters is the way I treat everyone I encounter in the course of my days: my wife, my child, a friend, a colleague, a secretary, a textbook salesperson, a complaining student.

They talked about how his sense of humor lightened the mood of a stressful day. They talked about how generously he gave his time to help someone new to the company. They talked about how quick he was to make friends, about the respect and affection he showed to everyone in the company, from the owner to the freight elevator operator. They talked about love.

All this time, I realized, I had been wrong. I had thought that work and love are separate, competing realms, two slices of a pie. Whatever I gave to one took away from the other; time devoted to work meant a loss in love. But my image of a love-work dichotomy was wrong. There are not two crucial aspects of life, as Freud said. There is only one, and it is love.

When I say that I had a revelation at my father's funeral, I don't want to imply that I made any radical changes in the outward circumstances of my life. I may have rejected the notion that I need to "balance" work and love, but that doesn't alter the fact that I need to work for a living; that my job demands a great deal of my time; that I like my work and want to do well at it. What has changed is my sense that my job constitutes a separate part of my life, removed from the realm of love.

I used to think that the goal of life is to do equally well in the spheres of work and love. Now I know that there is only one sphere. What matters is the way I treat everyone I encounter in the course of my days: my wife, my child, a friend, a colleague, a secretary, a textbook salesperson, a complaining student. What's important is to treat each with courtesy, with respect . . . with love.

Though it was my father's funeral that reminded me of the absolute importance of my relationships with others, the point is not to win praise at my own funeral. Nor is the point the self-gratification I get from being regarded as a nice guy. What's at stake is more profound than those desires. I've realized that every encounter with another

person, no matter how trivial, sends an unspoken message about the meaning of life. If, in a seemingly trivial encounter with someone at work, I am distracted or brusque or suspicious, I convey the message, "I'm looking out for number one." But if I can treat everyone I meet with calmness, concern, friendliness, and generosity, I send a different message about life's meaning. And though I can never be certain just how a message is received, I hope that they hear something like this: "The self doesn't matter. We're all connected in a web of love. Pass it on!" ■

What *IS* a Bar Mitzvah, Anyway, and Why am I Having it Here at Klezkamp?

LINCOLN SCHNUR-FISHMAN

A 13-year old boy ponders the meaning of the coming-of-age ritual in the Jewish faith.

I'm the youngest boy in my class (I go to an Orthodox Jewish Day School), so I get to watch everybody else's bar mitzvah and do what my parents call a post mortem: thinking about what I liked and what I didn't, and about what my own bar mitzvah would be like.

My first question to myself was, "What *is* a bar mitzvah, really?" It took me a long time to figure that out. Maybe it's a big party where you are the center of attention. Maybe, like for some of my friends, it's just your 13th birthday, except you get extra money. Is it a time to say you're the same as everybody else? Is it a time to say you're the same as everybody else? Or is it just a time for parents to kvell (melt from joy)? I finally decided that my bar mitzvah was kind of about three things.

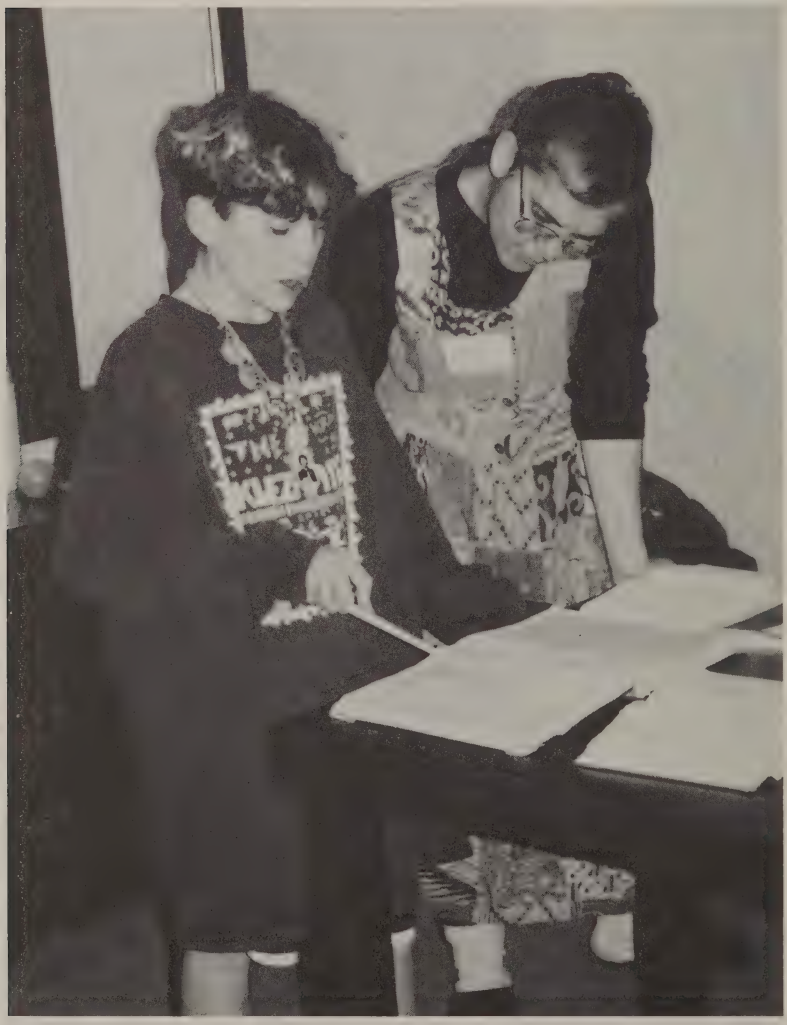
1. First of all, becoming literate.

I decided my bar mitzvah was about learning the whole service. I decided I didn't want a rabbi on the *bimah* (pulpit) saying dopey things and orchestrating everything. I wanted to *davven* (pray) the whole service myself As I learned more and more, I got really excited. Over the summer I took the *siddur* (prayer book) out to our backyard one evening and I did the whole service for my parents. It felt great that I could speed-davven it. I felt like the more I knew, the more I loved being-Jewish. ➤

An eighth-grader at Abrams Hebrew Academy in Yardley, PA, Lincoln Fishman is the son of Rabbi Susan Schnur and Len Fishman, New Jersey's Commissioner of Health. His sister, Anne, is 8-years-old.

2. *The second thing is making my own decisions and deciding who I am.*

My mother had said to me that she was trying to figure out what a bar mitzvah "really" is too, and that she thought one of the main things was for me to call the shots. That making these decisions myself — like about what I would read, where the bar mitzvah would be, who would get what parts, etc. — was the whole point. I was like the new adult here — my bar mitzvah is the beginning of a new stage



Lincoln studying with his mother, Rabbi Susan Schnur.

where I'm in charge of thinking through what's right for me to do. Most kids have no say about their bar mitzvahs — their parents and their rabbi just sort of do the whole thing over their heads. I didn't want that.

I realized I'm not interested in *kavvanah* — what the prayers mean, and whether I agree with them. Instead, what I'm interested in is that *davvening* be just like brushing my teeth or something. Like a ritual you've been doing for so long that you lose sight of the meaning, and you just do it. I just *davven* because that's what I do. Our *chavurah* is real concerned with *kavvanah* stuff. But I realized that what meant something to me wasn't the meaning of the prayers — I don't think I'll ever really feel like "Wow, now I get it" to the meaning of most prayers. What means a lot to me is that I am literate, that I have worked hard to become comfortable leading all these prayers.

My bar mitzvah means it's time for me to start thinking about being older — it's my job to decide who I'm going to be. Like I have the main say in whether what I do is right, whether I'm spoiled, how I act rolling my eyes. I always stand up for friends, but it means thinking through why. Before, my parents would decide if things were okay or not, but now it's my job to figure out what to do and not do.

It's my job to decide who I'm going to be.

3. *The third thing that my bar mitzvah is about is having new responsibilities and privileges.*

When I turned 13 six months before my bar mitzvah, I started to do my own laundry and other household chores. I called neighbors in order to start baby-sitting, and soon I'll get my own room too, instead of sharing with my sister — and my parents say they won't tell me to clean it up. I also started volunteering in a Jewish old-age home on Friday afternoons. After I wheel the residents into dinner, my parents and Anna come and we sing *zmiros* (Sabbath songs) and say *Kiddish* (Sabbath blessings over the wine) with the old people. I can't say I love going to the old-age home — it still feels like a hard thing to do — but I'm committed to sticking it out, and I think that eventually I'll have new feelings about the experience.

I also fasted on Yom Kippur for the first time, and broke the fast with Shilovivtz (which just about killed me). I'll lead the seder for the first time this year too. My family thought my bar mitzvah should feel

like a real turning point for me in as many ways as possible, so we saved up a lot of "firsts."

How I came to decide that I wanted my bar mitzvah to be at KlezKamp.

It's that I started to feel really strongly that bar and bat mitzvah don't last long enough. It's just a couple of hours and BAM. It's over. You come into school on Monday and nothing's different.

I talked to my grandfathers about their bar mitzvahs and I saw that a bar mitzvah used to be an ordinary thing — not a super-duper thing — but an ordinary thing within the context of a whole Jewish life. I think a lot of bar mitzvahs are the opposite. They're big fancy parties, putting a kid up on a pedestal — in the end, it isn't about Jewish stuff very much; it's about the kid being on the pedestal.

Blessed is the Name of the Master of the Universe, blessed is Your crown and Your place. May Your favor remain with Your people Israel forever; may You display the salvation of Your right hand to Your people in Your Holy Temple, to benefit us with the goodness of Your luminescence and to accept our prayers with mercy. May it be Your will that You extend our lives with goodness and that I be numbered among the righteous; that You have mercy on me and protect me, all that is mine and that is Your people Israel's. It is You Who nourish all and sustain all. You control everything. It is You Who control kings, and kingship in Yours. I am a servant of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and I prostrate myself before Him and before the glory of His Torah at all times. Not in any man do I put trust, nor on any angel do I rely— only on the God of heaven Who is the God of Truth. Whose Torah is truth and Whose prophets are true and Who acts liberally with kindness and truth. In Him do I trust, and to His glorious and holy Name do I declare praises. May it be Your will that You open my heart to the Torah and You fulfill the wishes of my heart and the heart of Your entire people Israel for good, for life, and for peace. (Amen)

A prayer from Lincoln's bar mitzvah service.

For me, most bar mitzvahs seemed too short and too fancy; I wanted mine to be real long and not fancy.

KlezKamp is a whole week. I've come here every summer of my life since I was six, I love it. If KlezKamp didn't exist, I don't know what I would do. It's like a *shtetl* where you hear and play music all week and you go to classes and run around. I wanted my bar mitzvah to feel like I'm surrounded by *Yiddishkeit,* and then I just go do my little part.

Reading my Torah portion — how Yaakov's "soul is bound up" with his youngest son Binyamin — I thought, 'This is how my soul is bound up with KlezKamp and *Yiddishkeit.*' In the *parshah*, Yehudah explains why his brothers can't bring Binyamin down to Egypt: "We have a father, an old man, and he has a child of his old age, a little one, and the lad's brother is dead, and the lad alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him."

This is about keeping something alive. It's keeping alive Rakhel's lineage; it's how generations need each other; how the souls of different generations are bound up with each other. If there is nobody to carry on, you lose everything. KlezKamp for me means doing my part to carry on, keeping alive the souls of my grandparents' grandparents. Just like Rinyamin's brother is dead (or so the brothers think), most Jewish kids don't know about *Yiddishkeit* — so that leaves me to be "the Binyamin" of my grandparents' old age. I'm lucky because I get to come to KlezKamp, and my grandparents talk freely about Yiddish culture, and my parents love it and think it's valuable.

I wouldn't have done my bar mitzvah here if it didn't really mean something to me. I've chosen to have the most important milestone in my life here because I'm saying 'I'm committed.' I'm bound up in the souls before me, too. They give my everything — the music, the culture, everything.

I feel good starting my adult Jewish life feeling like I've been true to myself, and that I've worked hard, and that (with this first major thing in my life) I've figured out how to do what's right for me, and how happy I am that *Yiddishkeit* — Judaism — will always be in my life. ■

Mrs. G.

It is a painful experience
to greet Mrs. G. to say
to her words of solace, not
knowing if she hears you.

Still every Friday I am at
her bedside, holding her hand,
chanting prayers, humming songs,
and saying words of consolation.

She is aware of my presence,
her eyes smile, she shakes
her head, but she never talks:
Absolute, complete silence.

The nurse tries to assure me
that there are no cures for
patients like Mrs. G.
They call it "Mental disturbance."

On the Eve of Passover
Festival I recited prayers,
old traditional melodies of
Passover Seder, "Ma Nishtano..."

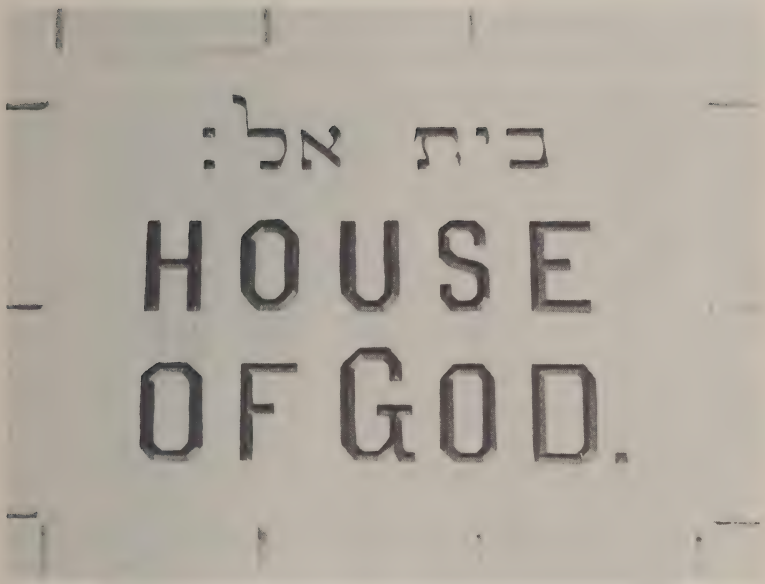
I sang the blessing over wine,
let a crumb of Matzoh touch her
lips. I noticed a change in her
face, she experienced gladness.

She opened her lips and mumbled:
"Happy Passover." Thank you.
The nurse said it is a miracle,
Joy was filling my heart.

I prayed: "Be thou praised,
O Eternal, King of the universe,
who has sustained us alive, and
permitted us to witness this solemnity."

Herman Taube

Herman Taube writes poems to give comfort to his Jewish people in nursing homes, hospitals, and hospices. His poetry was sent to Fellowship in Prayer *by Rabbi Saul H. Koss, Director, Jewish Chaplaincy Services, UJA Federation of Greater Washington.*



Paul M. Schrock

A Prayer after the Oklahoma City Bombing

I am the building that was blown apart by a bomb in the "heartland" of America. My heart is blown open. The front of me falls away: I am the gaping floors, the broken glass, the dangling wires, the film of concrete dust that rises into the air.

This is my body.

I am the children who were killed: the little ones, the innocent, tender little people full of play and laughter. The babies.

This is my body.

I am the women and men who were killed, the mother, father, husband, wife, grandparent, neighbor, relative, friend, startled by death on an ordinary day.

This is my body.

I am those who mourn: the suddenly bereaved, the shocked, the bereft. I am the mother clutching a picture of her two children, the husband grieving his newly-wed wife.

This is my body.

I am the rescue workers, the medical personnel, those who hope against hope, and those who are faithful even when there *is* no hope, those who press on into the rubble, searching for the living, the wounded, the dead, searching for what is human, for what is loved.

This is my body.

I am the ones who planned and planted the bomb: the hardhearted, the fearful, the numb and angry ones who no longer care. (When Timothy McVeigh is shown pictures of the dead, particularly dead children, he has no reaction at all. Says one source, "[There was] nothing. Zero reaction from that son of a bitch. This guy is a stone.")

This is my body.

I am the ones who fill the airwaves with venom and hate. "Take them out in the desert and blow them up." "Shoot 'em." "I hope they fry."

This is my body.

I am the Holy Spirit, brooding over our bent world with bright wings. I am the wings of Jesus, tenderly outstretched above the city, sheltering everything and everyone beneath.

This is my body. ➢

I cannot hold it all. I hand it to you, Jesus. Hold it with me.

And suddenly I see that I am handing you the cross: here, *you* carry it. I cannot.

And he has taken it up. He is carrying all of this, all of this. The dead, the wounded, and those who mourn; the killers and those who were killed; the frightened, the angry, the sorrowful — he is carrying *all* of this, all of *us* every part of us, into the loving heart of God. ■

Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

Tom Dunham

An Episcopal priest at Grace Church in Newton, MA, Margaret Bullitt-Jonas is also a lecturer in Pastoral Theology at Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge.

Mindful Consuming

THICH NHAT HANH

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I vow to cultivate good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I vow to ingest only items that preserve peace, well-being, and joy in my body, in my consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family and society. I am determined not to use alcohol or any other intoxicant or to ingest foods or other items that contain toxins, such as certain TV programs, magazines, books, films, and conversations. I am aware that to damage my body or my consciousness with these poisons is to betray my ancestors, my parents, my society, and future generations. I will work to transform violence, fear, anger, and confusion in my self and in society by practicing a diet for myself and for society. I understand that a proper diet is crucial for self-transformation and for the transformation of society.

In modern life, people think that their body belongs to them and they can do anything they want to it. When they make such a determination, the law supports them. This is one of the manifestations of individualism. But, according to the teachings of emptiness, non-self, and interbeing, your body is not yours alone. It also belongs to your ancestors, your parents, future generations, and all other living beings. Everything, even the trees and the clouds, has come together to bring about the presence of your body. Keeping your body healthy is the best way to express your gratitude to the whole cosmos, to all ancestors, and also not to betray future generations. You practice this precept for everyone. If you are healthy, everyone can benefit from it. When you are able to get out of the shell of your small self, you will see that you are interrelated to everyone and everything, that your every act is linked with the whole of humankind and the whole cosmos. To keep yourself healthy in body and mind is to be kind to all things. ■

The author of 25 books, a zen master and poet, Thich Nhat Hanh was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This excerpt is taken from his new book, Living Buddha, Living Christ, *1995, Riverhead Books, a division of G. P. Putnam's sons, NYC.*

Two Emissaries of Peace: A Joyful Meeting

ARTHUR STEIN

A poignant meeting between an Indian spiritual teacher and an Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations occurred ten years ago, but observers have never forgotten.

On the morning of July 11, 1986 I had the opportunity to witness a memorable meeting between Sant Darshan Singh and Dr. Robert Muller, then Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations. Sant Darshan's first visit to the United Nations began with a few moments of prayer and meditation in the Dag Hammarskjold Meditation Room, then a swift elevator ride up to the 36th floor of the Secretariat Building, where he and his wife, Harbhajan, were warmly welcomed by Robert and Margarita Muller.

A plaque reading "Man of Peace" hung on the wall of Dr. Muller's office, given in recognition of his forty years of service to humanity at the United Nations. Indeed, he was affectionately known as the United Nations' Prophet of Hope, for his abiding faith in the human spirit and for his many contributions to peace throughout the world. The meeting between him and Sant Darshan Singh, a spiritual teacher highly respected for his work on behalf of human unity, was truly a dialogue of two ambassadors of peace. One came from Alsace-Lorraine, France, the other from Delhi, India, yet both spoke a unifying language of love which transcends boundaries, East and West.

Although it was their first personal meeting, it was as if two old friends were reunited with each other. They spoke of the need to rise above the artificial barriers which separate nation from nation and person from person. Both emphasized the need to give utmost attention to the care and education of humanity's most valuable resource, our children.

Their two hour dialogue was very wide ranging. At one point, Robert Muller began speaking about his ideas for the new learning center which was soon to be established in Costa Rica, called the University for Peace. It was the first of its kind, and appropriately located in Costa Rica, which in 1948 had disbanded its armed forces. ➢

Dr. Arthur Stein teaches courses in Peace Studies including "The World's Religions and Global Change" in the Political Science Department of the University of Rhode Island. A scholar, peace activist, and poet, his most recent book was Seeds of the Seventies: Values, Work and Commitment in America.

During their exchange about the university and the nature of peace, Sant Darshan noted that the peace of which enlightened persons have spoken is not simply the absence of hostility, but "it is a peace which is intensely positive, for it is born out of their vision of the oneness of life." He then amiably suggested renaming the new school in Costa Rica the University for Love and Peace, because peace is a by-product of love and love, in its deepest meaning, is the basic foundation upon which true peace can be established. Robert Muller thought for a moment, and then, nodding his head, responded enthusiastically, "Yes, perhaps it should be known as the University for Love and Peace."

After their discussion, Dr. Muller proposed taking Sant Darshan to enjoy the beauty of the United Nations Rose Garden and for them to plant a rose bush in the name of peace. On the way, they stopped at the Security Council chambers, the scene of many heated Cold War disputes for over forty years. The chamber contained a long curved table with placards bearing the names of the member nations of the Security Council. Beyond the table was a majestic mural painted by a Scandinavian artist. At its base, the mural depicts the horrors of war, but as it ascends upwards it shows beautiful scenes of an emergent humanity, living in harmony.

Dr. Muller, Sant Darshan Singh, and those with them, stood facing the delegates' table and the mural. Suddenly there was complete silence. Sant Darshan Singh had closed his eyes and folded his hands in prayer. Dr. Muller joined him, and for several minutes all stood in silent meditation. A deep calm and reverence permeated the hall. Here, where rancorous debates on conflicts between nations have often taken place, stood two emissaries of peace, praying with one mind, one heart, and one soul, for human unity and respect for our planetary community.

Here, where rancorous debates on conflicts between nations have often taken place, stood two emissaries of peace, praying with one mind, one heart, and one soul.

Looking back on that poignant moment, I recall that it took place rather synchronistically around the time in 1986 when the spirit of *glasnost* had just begun to emerge in the Soviet Union. Within a few years the Cold War had thawed.

Sant Darshan Singh's lifework came to a close in 1989, months after he had brought together people from around the world to Delhi

to participate in a Human Unity Conference. His teaching that heartfelt prayer and the practice of meditation can serve in developing peace, both within oneself and in the world, is ably carried forward by his spiritual successor, Sant Rajinder Singh. Robert Muller continues his work as Emeritus chancellor of the University for Peace in Costa Rica giving tirelessly of himself wherever needed in the world as an inspired educator and advocate for global community. The exemplary lives of Robert Muller and Sant Darshan Singh and their visionary messages of hope continue to inspire peacebuilders around the planet.■

Paul M. Schrock

The full transcript of their talk is contained in Ambassadors of Peace: A Dialogue at the United Nations between Dr. Robert Muller and Sant Darshan Singh *(University for Peace, Costa Rica, 1988), pp 5-24.*

More Than Anything Else in the Spiritual Life

THOMAS MERTON

The Christian mystics of all ages sought and found not only the unification of their own being, not only union with God, but union with one another in the Spirit of God. To seek a union with God that would imply complete separation, in spirit as well as in body, from all the rest of mankind, would be to a Christian saint not only absurd but the very opposite of sanctity. Isolation in the self, inability to go out of oneself to others, would mean incapacity for any form of self-transcendence. To be thus the prisoner of one's own selfhood is, in fact, to be in hell: a truth that Sartre, though professing himself an atheist, has expressed in the most arresting fashion in his play *No Exit (Huis Clos)*.

All through the [writings of the mystics] we find a repeated insistence on the primacy of love over everything else in the spiritual life: over knowledge, gnosis, asceticism, contemplation, solitude, prayer. Love in fact is the spiritual life, and without it all the other exercises of the spirit, however lofty, are emptied of content and become mere illusions. The more lofty they are, the more dangerous the illusion.

Love, of course, means something much more than mere sentiment, much more than token favors and perfunctory almsdeeds. Love means an interior and spiritual identification with one's brother, so that he is not regarded as an "object" to "which" one "does good." The fact is that good done to another as to an object, is of little or no spiritual value. Love takes one's neighbor as one's other self, and loves him with all the immense humility and discretion and reserve and reverence without which no one can presume to enter into the sanctuary of another's subjectivity. From such love all authoritarian brutality, all exploitation, domineering and condescension must necessarily be absent. The saints of the desert were enemies of every subtle or gross expedient by which "the spiritual man" contrives to bully those he thinks inferior to himself, thus gratifying his own ego. They had renounced everything that savored of punishment and revenge, however hidden it might be.

A trappist monk at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in Louisville, Ky, Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was the author of some 60 books on the spiritual life, many of them classics which have gone into reprint after reprint. This excerpt is taken from The Wisdom of the Desert, *a New Directions paperback,* *© by the Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc.*

The charity of the Desert Fathers is not set before us in unconvincing effusions. The full difficulty and magnitude of the task of loving others is recognized everywhere and never minimized. It is hard to really love others if love is to be taken in the full sense of the word. Love demands a complete inner transformation - for without this we cannot possibly come to identify ourselves with our brother. We have to become, in some sense, the person we love. ■

MEETING JESUS AGAIN FOR THE FIRST TIME: The Historic Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith *by Marcus J. Borg, Harper San Francisco, 1994, 150 pages, paperback, $11.00.*

Over the years, the Christianity of my childhood and the image of Jesus it presented had gone flat and lost meaning for me. This deadening and loss had come about for many reasons, including a long struggle with doctrines and creeds that I could not — and cannot — believe; heavy-handed and stifling "shoulds" and "should nots"; and too many long-winded sermons that even the ministers themselves seemed bored with.

Equally, and of growing importance, I found that the patriarchal attitudes of the Church excluded me from the main table. So I bolted.

Then, browsing in a bookstore recently, I came upon Marcus Borg's book, with an endorsement from a bishop of the church I had left many years ago, a man for whom I had — and have — great respect. He said: "Borg breaks open the religious encrustations of the ages and invites us to look with fresh eyes at the Jesus that the church has distorted in the service of its doctrines and its creeds."

Intrigued, I bought the book, and what I read in it touched me to the core. The Jesus revealed in this book is a vivid man, a "spirit person" as Borg described him, a mediator of the sacred, a man who, rather than simply believing in God, fully knew God as an experiential reality.

The central and all-pervading quality of the God that Jesus experienced is compassion, Borg says, and *imitatio dei*, a life centered in God, means "Be compassionate as God is compassionate." Compassion, as manifested in Jesus' life and teachings, is both feeling and a way of being that flows from feeling with someone else in a visceral way; being moved by another on a gut level. This quality of the heart was central to Jesus' teachings as he offered, in the place of the conventional wisdom of the world, a journey of transformation centered on one's own relationship with God.

As a social prophet, Jesus challenged the religious, political and economic establishments of his time, offering instead an alternative vision of community shaped by the ethos and politics of compassion. As a movement founder, his was a movement of radical inclusion, challenging the social boundaries of his day. He was a loving friend of women, of children, of untouchables, the poor, the marginalized.

Many individual Christians and so-called Christian political groups and churchmen today would be appalled by Jesus, by the wise, kind,

and brilliant man who would strike them as radically and subversively egalitarian. Immigrants, AIDS victims, mothers on welfare and their children, the unemployed, homosexuals, those who want equal rights, status, and treatment for women, minorities of all races — all would be included fully in his envisioned community.

This image of Jesus grew out of Borg's many years as a Jesus scholar and as a participant in the Jesus Seminars, a group of religion scholars who started meeting in 1985 to examine the historical accuracy of the sayings of Jesus in the gospels. They separated out those saying that are most likely to have been said by Jesus from those that were most probably the voice of the collective, but attributed to Jesus by later authors.

Stripped of centuries of doctrines, creeds, and interpretations by those with their own views to express, what is revealed is a "Spirit Person" who consistently pointed not to himself, but to God; and not to believing *in* God but to being in relationship *with* God and the radical, inclusionary way of being that this God of compassion invites. I find this vision of Jesus irresistible. *Anne Walsh*

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